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Office of
National Preparedness

Smart Practices Spotlight

January 15, 2003

Evacuating Individuals with Special Needs Linn County, Iowa, Emergency Management Agency

Summary: *After working with the local nuclear power plant to develop a plan for evacuating individuals with special needs, the Linn County Emergency Management Agency took few extra steps to ensure those individuals would be taken care of during all kinds of emergencies and disasters.*

When the Linn County Emergency Management Agency developed a program to help individuals requiring special assistance in the event of a radiological incident at a local nuclear power plant, it realized the importance of taking this group into account in all its emergency operations plans, regardless of the kind of event. The next step was to develop a program that would compile information about people with special needs and provide an easy way for first responders to access that information to assist in their evacuation.

The program is straightforward and effective. Registration is kept simple to ensure quick enrollment. Registration cards were mailed to every household in the county, which also is home to the City of Cedar Rapids. Additionally, registration cards are given to home care workers, such as Meals on Wheels staff, Hospice workers, and others to pass on to members of the special needs population interested in registration.

Those who feel they or members of their family might need special assistance during an emergency simply register with the county emergency management agency. The information is then entered into a database and cross-walked with the county's Geographic Information System. This allows emergency personnel to quickly determine the location and specific needs of individuals during a disaster. With detailed information on each person with special needs, responders can address their needs more effectively. For example, multiple responders may be sent to assist an individual who is bedridden or known to be hearing impaired.

"The majority of those registered live in their own homes and can manage on a regular basis, but would probably require some additional help during an emergency," said Walter Wright, director, Linn County Emergency Management Agency. To help ensure full coverage for those with special needs, the county launched a media campaign encouraging residents who may require assistance to let the county know who they are and where they live. So far, the database includes over 1,400 individuals with special needs.

Thinking Locally:

How are you incorporating individuals with special needs into your emergency planning?
How are you specifically addressing their needs?

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Smart Practices Spotlight highlights practices and ideas that members of the emergency management and responder community have found useful and effective; they are not necessarily advocated or endorsed by FEMA. For more information about this initiative, contact Walter Wright, director, Linn County Emergency Management Agency, at linnema@jmbest.net or (319) 363-2671